A Snappy Guide to Differentiating “Affect” and “Effect”

Do you often catch yourself in a situation wherein you do not know whether to use the word “affect” or “effect” in a sentence?

Well, you are not alone.

The affect-effect dilemma is a common grammatical issue plaguing many people, even writers and professionals.

Here is a quick guide you can bookmark in case you experience such confusion again or you simply need to review the proper use of both words.

In that case, the verb “affect” denotes the act of changing or influencing something while the noun “effect” is defined as something that occurs due to a cause. An effect is usually the result of something that has been affected.

Here’s a quick informal technique for you: If it is not easy for you to remember that that the word “affect” is most commonly used as a verb while “effect” is usually used as a noun, then label this confusion as “aven.” It sounds like amen. The “av” in aven should make you recall affect as verb and the “en” is effect as noun.

Affect as Verb	Effect as Noun
The hurricane affected several areas including key cities in the U.S.	The drastic effect of the hurricane’s destruction left U.S. politicians scrambling for immediate rehabilitation plans.
Climate change has greatly affected the world’s approach towards energy production.	The effect of climate change is evident in the increase of global temperature.

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The proliferation of social media has dramatically affected the youth’s approach towards building relationships with other people.	Does this medicine have any side effect?

The other side of “affect” and “effect”

There are less known uses for both these words.

“Effect” can sometimes used as a verb to express “to bring about.”

Examples:

Incorrect: The clamor for renewable energy are pressuring legislators to affect change through a new energy bill.
Correct: American athletes use their money and influence to effect change in the behaviour of youth, particularly the less privileged kids.
Incorrect: We need unity as a nation because politicians alone cannot affect progress in our country.
Correct: It’s the millennials’ turn now to effect the social changes that this country needs.
On the other hand, “affect” has a secondary, less known use as a verb which indicates “to put on a false show of.”

Examples:

Michelle affected surprise when they gave her the gift she was expecting.
He affected remorse over the death of his long-time enemy.

Trickier uses

“Affect” can also be used as a noun in a sentence to describe facial expression.

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Examples:

Dr. Cooper took the news of her father’s passing with little affect.
Don’t give me that affect when I am trying to discipline you.
The plural form “effects” can also be used to refer to personal belongings.

Examples:

You must leave your personal effects before entering a highly secured correctional facility.
When they saw the zombies, they forgot to get their effects and ran fast.

Still not an affect-effect wizard?

Getting the accurate uses of affect and effect doesn’t start with simply knowing each word can be used in different forms.

Instead, start with getting to know the purpose of your sentence.

What do you want to say or emphasize to your readers? Is it about how the weather changed your mood (focusing on the action = it affected your mood) or to describe the impact right away of the weather on your mood (describing the state of your mood = the effect of weather)?

Try to read it aloud or to a friend. Sometimes, instinct will tell you that something doesn’t sound right. For example, “I left my personal affects in the bathroom.” “Personal affects” sounds like some feelings were left in the bathroom. That might work for very deep poets but the accurate term is “personal effects.”

Get help. If a mentor is not available, you can check your text online. There’s a link in the sidebar of this blog.

If you want to master “affect” and “effect” by heart, then use the following table as a quick guide. Copy, print it out, and keep it handy.

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	Affect	Effect
Most common form used	Verb – to change or influence something. Ex. Smoking cigarettes could adversely affect your lungs.	Noun – something that occurs due to a cause. Ex. The effect of cigarette smoking on our lungs is undesirable.
Other less common uses	Verb – to put on a false show of. Ex. She affected surprise towards the news because she has already been informed earlier.	Verb – to bring about. Ex. We need to effect change ourselves in order to inspire the youth to follow suit.
	Noun – description of a facial expression. Ex. Schizophrenia causes young men to have a flat affect.	Noun – plural form; personal belongings. Ex. Some of his personal effects were on display during the interment.

So don’t let tricky grammar rules affect your confidence because the effect of continuous learning and practice can do wonders.

Try our affect vs. effect online exercise and please share your score in the comments below.

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